The First Prof. C. Parvathamma Memorial Lecture, 2006

Genesis, Mechanism and Growth of Caste System in South India

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

It gives us immense pleasure to publish the 1st Prof. C. Parvathamma Memorial Lecture, by Prof. Nandu Ram, on behalf of RC-9: Dalits and Backward Classes of the Indian Sociological Society, New Delhi. The lecture was delivered on December 28, at Loyala College, Chennai during the XXXII All India Sociological Conference, held under the auspices of the Indian Sociological Society, jointly organized by the Department of Sociology, Madras University and Loyala College, Chennai between 27-29 December, 2006.

As is well known by now, Prof. C. Parvathama passed away, at her residence in Mysore city, on 1st August, 2006 at the age of 79. She was the first generation Dalit Sociologist of India. Having received her Ph.D from Victoria University, Manchester, U.K. under the supervision of Prof. Max Gluckman, she joined University of Mysore as a lecture in Sociology and retired as Professor and Head of Department of Sociology in the University. Through her serious academic pursuit, she contributed immensely to our understanding of South Indian village society and social life of Dalits. She had done a pioneering research on Veersaiva movement in Karnataka, and in her book—*Religion and Politics*, she in which

she meticulously analysed her data and found an intrigued relationship between religion and politics where religion was used as a political means to gain certain favour, which otherwise might have not been possible through the usual procedure laid for the same. More precisely, she had found how the temple priests and their supporters used to enjoy the favours of the visiting worshippers, especially the high level government functionaries including politicians, in getting the variety of works done violating the standard prescribed procedures. Her writings, especially on Lingayats and their beliefs, opened new vistas of research for many social scientists, specially Sociologists and Social Anthropologists.

As an institution builder, she played a critical role in building the Sociology Department of Mysore University, and an independent research Centre for the Tribal and Peasant Studies in the city of Mysore itself. Though she suffered from triple discrimina-tions of Caste, Class and Gender, yet through her grit and determination she made a space for herself in the corridors of academics where Dalits are seldom welcomed. The irony is that her contributions were never taken serious note of, during her life-time, either in Karnataka or outside. One of the reasons for this might be her quest for objectivity or objective analysis in her academic writings, which the Indian academic mindset is not yet acumstomed of. In spite of all this, she will remain alive forever in the profession of Sociology and keep on inspiring the coming generation of Sociologists.

As a mark of respect to the academic credential of this pioneering Dalit personality and also in appreciation of her contributions in the profession of Sociology, RC-9 has instituted the Prof. C. Parvathamma Memorial Lecture Series. The Committee unanimously agreed to request Prof. Nandu Ram to deliver this inaugural lecture at Chennai, to which he readily and happily agreed. Prof. Ram became a natural choice for this because of two reasons: one, he enjoyed special rapport with late Prof. Parvathamma. Secondly, as one of the leading Sociologists of India, who has spent more than quarter of a century in the profession, it was only he who could fit the bill. With his original academic thinking, and research endeavour,

Prof. Ram's contribution has been phenomenal. The empathy with which he has approached the subject 'Dalits in India' has set new academic standards, which others could follow. As a researcher, Prof. Nandu Ram has published more than three dozen research articles and 3 books. His monumental and voluminous work "Encyclopaedia of Scheduled Castes in India" is a pioneering work as far as Sociology is concerned, as till now only demographers and administrators have authored a few encyclopaedia on various issues. Prof. Ram is also the second generation Dalit Sociologist, who has groomed a number of young Dalit Sociologists, engaged in teaching and research in different universities and colleges and other educational institutions throughout the country. The heartening part of this grooming of new generation Dalit Sociologists is that a few of them are also now pursuing the profession in several educational institutions abroad.

Prof. Ram holds Dr. Ambedkar Chair in Sociology at the Centre for the Study of Social Systems, School of Social Sciences in Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi since its inception in 1995. He was the Chairperson of the Centre during 1999-2001, and Member of the Executive Council and Academic Council of several universities—both State and Central (including Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi) in the country. He has also been Director General of Babasaheb Ambedkar National Institute of Social Sciences at Mhow (the birth-place of Babasaheb Ambedkar) in district Indore, M.P. during 2001-2004, where he applied his rich and vast vision to provide a vigorous academic pursuit to the students and faculty of the Institute.

Since the Sociological Conference was held at Chennai, Tamil Nadu, he had rightly chosen the theme of his lecture related to caste system and untouchability in South India. His lecture, based on his meticulous research by using both historical and sociological as well as social and cultural anthropological source-materials, traces the genesis, development and mechanism of the caste system in South India since the ancient period of evolution of its society and culture. It also deals with a number of dynamic mechanisms, including

one adopted from North India during the 4th-12th century A.D., operative for the growth or development of caste system in South India. In fact, it is during this period the South Indian caste system became fully Hinduised and the untouchability, as a socio-religious institution, not only was systemized but also got legitimised by the Hindu Dharmshastras. By making a fine distinction between the notion of pollution and institution of untouchability, the lecture dwells richly into the genesis of the South Indian caste system from the tribal source, where it explains extensively a number of tribal traits, like clan system, practice of *gotra*, totem and taboo as well as a few cultural practices-including belief system, mode of worship, etc. sporadically found in the caste. Finally, it concludes by elucidating the present status of the Untouchables or Scheduled Castes or Dalits, along with their assertion and movement for gaining a respectful social identity in the society and culture in general and that in the local regions in particular in the Provinces or States and Union Territory in South India.

The Committee is profusely thankful to Prof. Ram for the meritocracy, empathy ad generosity with which he has handled the subject within the stipulated time-frame. Keeping in view the timely relevance of theme of the lecture, the Committee has decided to publish it for the benefits and inspiration for the wider readership in Social Sciences, both in India and abroad.

14 April, 2007

M.H. Makwana
Richard Rias
Vivek Kumar
For RC 9: Dalits and Backward Classes
Indian Sociological Society
New Delhi

Genesis, Mechanism and Growth of Caste System in South India

I am honoured in getting invited by *RCOI: Dalits and Backward Classes of the Indian Sociological Society* to deliver the First Professor C. Parvathamma Memorial Lecture at its 32nd Annual Conference held at Chennai, Tamil Nadu during 27-29 December 2006. My first acquaintance of late Prof. Parvathamma goes back to 1973 when I read her research paper on *Dr. Ambedkar and After: The Scheduled Caste Classed and Masses*, published in the *Eastern Anthropolist*. Then, I met her at I.I.T. Kanpur in 1978 and at Meerut in 1980, and discussed a number of academic issues especially pertaining to caste system and location of the Dalits or the Scheduled Castes in it. Subsequently, we also met atleast twice during 1990s at her residence, in some selection committee meeting. Though these meetings and reading her publications, I had found in her a fine brain, brilliant scholar, and a very meticulous researcher in her academic pursuit, Endowed with straight forwardness, elderly affection and fine personality, Prof. Parvathamma proved hersrlf to be loan crusader, after Baba Saheb Ambedkar, against the vulnerable position of Daits through her academic pursuit. This lecture is a modest tribute to her unforgotten memory and an inspiration to young social

scientists, specially sociologists and social anthropologists pursing the theme presented forthwith.

Indian society is said to be caste-ridden in whatsoever form caste exists, whether in old or new or even newer form. The sociological and social anthropological studies undertaken so far testify that the caste exists as a major social structural and cultural institution (Weber 1958), with its well-knit organisation or system. It exists not only among the Hindus but even the non-Hindu communities in India have adopted this system at least at the level of social interaction and commensal relations, though they reject its adoption as an ideological basis of their social structure and belief system. Hence, a few sociologists and social anthropologists (for instance, see Dumont 1970) have accepted it as a *pan* Indian phenomenon like the varna system. Contrary to it is the view of a few scholars that caste system, in their reckoning, persists in India not only as a cultural organisation and social structural system but remains a purely localised structural reality (Mencher 1974) or at least an adaptive structure (Berreman 1979) where it has necessarily embibed in itself the characteristics of other non-Hindu communities, including the tribal community (ies). In the same vein, there is lack of unanimity among the indologists, historians, ethnographers, and sociologists and social anthropologists on the varna / *jati* model of the Hindu society or system, i.e., of the two-varna and jati—which came first in its social formation. Also, there seems to be lack of unanimity among scholars about the varna model being structural reality at all at any point of time in Indian society. In fact, the varna system, in their opinion, never existed as a social structural reality; instead, it was an ideal or ideational construct in which the numerous castes and sub-castes were hierarchised and ranked as superior and inferior, alongwith ranking in superiority and inferiority of the four varnas.

Genesis of Caste System

Some are of the view that during the Vedic and later-Vedic periods, the Aryans (who later got identified as Hindus)

were divided into four *varnas*. In fact, the varna was a technical term used for the then existed four major castes (Muller 1883; Ambedkar 1979; Weber 1958) or classes or social categories which split later into numerous *jatis* and *upjatis* or castes and sub-castes or sub-sub-castes due to multiple reasons. Some of these were imposing or super-imposing endogamy over exogamy, the Brahmin's initially adopting a policy of closing their door of commensality or commensal relations, including marital alliance, with others which subsequently was followed by the latter groups or varnas (Ambedkar 1979), pursuing specific types of occupations as well as customs and belief systems by different groups of people, and so on and so forth. Opposed to this is the view heralded by a number of social scientists and foreign travellers who had visited India before the first millennium A.D. Such view accepts the presence of numerous groups, not varnas or castes, of the people pursuing different types of occupations, customs, belief systems and also having heterogeneous types of social organisations, interaction patterns, commensal relations, etc. Then, the extended view is that the four-fold varna model was, as mentioned above, an ideal devise or scheme of the Aryans under which the already existed numerous groups of the people were supposedly or notionally fitted. It is well accepted a fact that quite a few groups did not strictly fit in that, and yet others were either forcefully kept out or they themselves refused to get fitted in and opted out of the scheme. Such groups of people have obviously been termed either indigeneous or aborigines or tribals, Dravidians, *Antyajas*, *Antyavasins* (Ati-Shudras or Untouchables), etc. In other words, the varna system was an idealised version of social organisation or social structural arrangement of the then existed population of the Aryans, but in reality the people at large were living in numerous well- organised or loosely organised groups or social categories.

Not going here into further details of historiography of origin of caste or the caste system and also its major characteristics or attributes like hierarchy, separation or repulsion and inter-dependence (see Bougle 1971), we may

buy the argument, for the time—being, that the impressionistic view about the *varna* system being the *pan* Indian phenomenon or accepting the four-fold varna scheme at all India level prevalent during the ancient period gets falsified by the facts that are available through the archaeological excavations, historiographic interpretations of inscriptions, interpretations of and inferences drawn from the scriptures written or compiled in vernacular languages of different regions, and the ethnographic surveys done about the structural arrangements of almost all groups of people, including their customs, belief systems, commensal relations and occupations practised in different parts of the country. This then simply means that the ideal devise of the four-fold varna scheme was conceived of by the ancient sage-scholars and was ideationally or notionally operative within the Indo-Gangetic basin, though the exerting connived power did try, in some cases successfully but in many cases unsuccessfully, to install the scheme or system by transplanting the people of some varnas from the Indo-Gangetic basin to the other regions of the country as they were indigeneously not available there.

Contrary to this, caste system either in the form of collectivity of the numerous occupational groups or a well-structured system of social groups, as erroneously projected by some social scientists, has had ever existed at the pan Indian level though its structural arrangement varied from locale to locale or region to region. It may also be stated that the caste system as a unitary structure or a well-bounded social organisation never existed as a static entity; instead, numerous permutations and combinations have ever been in operation within it, making the system relatively complex and yet a dynamic one. Hence, caste system is not only a localised social structure but the latter has evolved several types of caste system and thus there are caste systems in India, though all of these supposedly operate within the frame of an idealised version of uniform hierarchy of caste system (see, Dumont 1970). Needless to say that such version of the caste system projects its resemblance with the varna system, though the numerous castes and sub-castes are not uniformally well

categorised and are unqualifyingly accepted within either four varnas in the varna system, or there exist even more caste categories placed in altogether different type of hierarchy of castes operative at the local or regional level. Yet, it cannot be denied that the numerous castes and sub-castes have been trying both successfully and unsuccessfully, especially since the colonial period, to get them accepted in the higher ranked castes within the four varna scheme. In other words, the process of synchronisation of the discrete caste categories (castes and sub-castes) has been going on in a continuous hierarchy of the caste system (Gupta 1993: 110- 142), though the continuous hierarchy or continuity of hierarchy is not universally and uniformally practised everywhere in the form of traditional ranking of all castes and sub-castes in the descending order of the Brahmin, Kshatriya or Rajput, Vaishya, Shudra and the Untouchables.

There is, however, no dearth of empirical evidences to suggest that in their day-to-day life people in different regions have not only down-graded but even denied the ritual or religious supremacy of the Brahmins or of their numerous castes or sub-castes. Contrary to it, it has been said that a Brahmin in a village is considered the superior most, irrespective of whether he possesses the traditional (ideal) attributes prescribed in the scriptures (Mandelbaum 1972:24). In certain areas, even the traditional supremacy or dominance of the Kshatriya or Rajput caste, with its sub-castes, has been challenged by the people of the economically, politically and numerically middle level dominant castes. Thus, one finds the earlier formulations easily contestable on the basis of the emergent empirical social realities in different parts of the country. A few such contestable formulations are like sanskritisation leading to positional change or change in the social position or social status of the lower castes but leaving their ranked position vis-à-vis the hierarchical structure of the caste system intact (Srinivas 1966), the top (Brahmin) and the bottom (the Shudra castes and by extension the Untouchables) ranks of the hierarchical caste system remaining intact or immobile and all permutations and combinations or

changes occurring only in the middle ranks or orders (Bailey 1964), and, as stated above, villager knowing fully well about the men of the Brahmin *jati* (caste including its sub-castes) of his village as being neither scholars nor trained priests yet accepting their highest ritual status or rank traditionally decreed on them (Mandelbaum 1972 : 24).

Mechanism and Growth of Castes

There are five main theses on the mechanism (s) and the consequent growth of caste as well as caste system in a region and from one region to the other over a period of time. Its growth is to be understood in terms of growing its number and consolidation of attributes prescribed to it in a given hierarchy of castes found in a region. How and by whom these attributes were evolved and prescribed to a caste and how were these accepted or contested by its members are not our immediate concerns here. Rather, we wish to state briefly the basic tenets of these theses and examine critically their being valid ones on the mechanisms for the growth of castes and the caste system.

The first thesis is of the policy of exclusion which means exclusion or throwing away or boycotting permanently members from a caste. Such policy has remained in operation since the early period of the Indo-Aryan and later Hindu society in India. This operates even today, especially among the lower castes in rural society, though it is applied generally on temporary and not permanent basis. As stated earlier, Ambedkar formulated his thesis, in 1916 (published in 1917), about the genesis of caste as an outcome of the superimposition of endogamy over exogamy (as form of marriage) which he considered as one of the mechanisms for the genesis as well as growth of caste. As part of his thesis, he referred to marriage of surplus men (widowers) and surplus women (widows) outside their group or caste and thereby forming another group or caste as growth of and one of the mechanisms for the genesis of caste into numerous other castes. The final point in his thesis he made is the closing door policy. In his conceded opinion, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra

were initially four classes or social classes and not castes, and the varna, with the Aryan origin, happened to be a technical term given to each class. The Brahmin, according him, was a class and its members first became a caste through coining and implementing the policy of closing their door for members of the other classes. In other words, the Brahmins adopted endogamy and closed their door of marriage and commensal relations for members of the other three classes. Thus, they first became closed in and then closed for others. "—while making themselves into a caste, the Brahmins, by virtue of this, created non-Brahmin caste; or, to express it in my way (says Ambedkar), while closing themselves in they closed others out" (Ambedkar 1979:20). Being guided by the notion of "pure self and impure other", they might have done this to make themselves as of pure blood and distinctive from others. Later, others imitated them and closed their own door still for others; and, hence, became endogamous. In the words of Ambedkar, "It is 'infection of imitation' that caught all these sub-divisions (non-Brahmins) on their onward march of differentiation and had turned them into castes" (Ibid:18). Ambedkar's thesis, though not widely acknowledged in sociological and social anthropological analysis of caste in India, stands on its own merit of logical argumentation and empirical verification even in the present time as numerous castes and sub-castes are said to have originated and grown through such mechanisms.

The second thesis on origin and growth of castes and sub-castes is about the mechanism or process of inclusion which, at the face of it, appears to be contradictory to the above stated thesis. Notwithstanding the invalidated contradiction between the two, the thesis of inclusion explains numerical strengthening and consolidation of castes and sub-castes since the early times in the history of genesis and growth of castes in India. It is evident from the socio-anthropological and historiographical analysis of the various segments of population of the indogenous and Indo-Aryan society of the ancient period that the people as a whole, including Aryans classified into Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra varnas,

were tribal in their beliefs, customs, taboos and totems, etc. (see, Risley 1908, Weber 1958, Kosambi 1956, Dutt 1986). More precisely, they were mixture of both Aryans and non-Aryans or native people (Kosambi 1953, 1956, 1962, 1965). This was found not only in north but also in south India where there was a total absence of such classification of people of the Indo-Aryan society. In fact, some people, especially with the nomenclature of Brahmin and Kshatriya or Rajanya from north were transported and inducted in the south, besides recruitment of the local people to these classes or varnas. Anyway, without going into details of their induction process and recruitment patterns, we wish to reiterate here that the policy or process of inclusion of outsiders, especially tribals (Kosambi 1956, Dutt 1986) into a class and later caste was approved and legitimised by the then existed power and authority for the purpose of organising and regulating society of a sort with its own ongoing tradition and civilisation of procreation as well as orientation.

It is, however, worth noting that as the system of caste happens to be a system of graded inequality (Ambedkar 1979) wherein each caste is ranked higher or lower with unequal ranked status and with cumulative social and ritual inequality with the other, the inclusion mechanism was operative in the vertical and not horizontal fashion. This means, the newcomers-both individuals and groups were included in a particular class or varna with lower ranked status (sub-caste) yet with the nomenclature of the same class or varna or with the independent ranked status (caste) in the hierarchically arranged system and thereby spreading at length and breadth of the caste system. However, there continued to be asymmetrical relationship among all of them, especially in terms of marriage and commensal relations, ritual purity, etc. It is also true that the independent ranked statuses or castes, not being satisfied with such partial or differential inclusion in the caste system, had all along been contesting for their complete inclusion in the idealised yet socially and religiously accepted system of distinctively ranked upper classes or varnas. Thus, this thesis stands valid as the mechanism of inclusion

and the resultant contest can easily be seen even in the present time.

The third thesis is of the transformation and spread of clans into castes which we have discussed, in details, in the following section. Here, we shall look briefly at the nature and composition of clan and the mechanism it adopted to get transformed into caste by changing its tenets or attributes and switching over to that of the caste. This thesis was initially formulated by Kosambi (1962) as a part of his larger explanation of formation of society and culture as well as of civilisation in Indian sub-continent, especially in the peninsular India. He has done this on the basis of the archaeological and historical evidences. Since the people of different stocks or groups observed clan (*gotra*) exogamy and married people of the other clans within the group, this gave birth to caste, and the clan subsided through the passage of time. This thesis has, in recent years, been discussed, in details, by Morton Klass (1998) who has explained elaborately how, in the past, clan got transformed into caste. Referring to Levi-Strauss' (1963) two structural type words 'bear' (totem) and 'barber' (caste system), Klass has accepted totemic groups as clans practicing rule of exogamy opposed to caste rule of endogamy. "Each 'clan', however, obeys the rule of exogamy: a male and a female of the same clan may not marry each other (as they are treated as brother and sister because of their supposed origin from the same descent), and so the spouse for each member of the society (clan) must be sought in a 'clan' or 'section' other than his or her own' (Klass 1998:139). This, in a way, supports Kosambi's thesis of 'marriage commune', consisting of a number of clans living in a single region or geographical territory. Klass has referred to it as "marriage circle" or caste (Ibid), though he has not specified whether such 'marriage circle' is territorially confined among the members of the same commune living in a single region or outside it. He has further added two more characteristics to his propositional thesis: "equalitarian clans" and "absolute surplus". In the case of equalitarian clans, he says that, "The galaxy of societies and social groups making up the precaste

(clan based) South Asian milieu exhibited, to a significant degree, endogamous clusters of exogamous, unstratified, stipulated-decent, "equalitarian clans", and that it was this galaxy—this *total* social and economic milieu-that was transformed into the stratified socioeconomic system we know of as "caste system" (Ibid: 158).

Similarly, Klass' thesis or sub-thesis of "absolute surplus" meant the continuous production of surplus, rather absolute production of food grains which was obviously more than that required for subsistance. Compared to those whose food production or items produced from hunting and gathering was for the bare subsistence, the producers of "absolute surplus" emerged as separate castes, though their clan affiliation remained the same (Klass 1998: 155-156; see also, Jaiswal 1998:4-6). This does not mean that castes originated only among those who had "absolute surplus"; rather those being less fortunate with bare subsistence production and rendering services, especially labour, to the fortunate ones as well as those being hunters and gatherers of the forest produces and living in the adjoining ecozones also formed castes through their interaction with the former. Interestingly, this thesis subscribes to the view that the mechanism of clans to castes, within different ecozones, was operative simultaneously throughout the whole South Asia, including India. Needless to say that all these castes were neither placed horizontally nor had equalitarian relations among them due to their differential position in the economic structure with whatsoever meager form it existed. Then at a much later stage, these castes vis-à-vis their system got legitimised with the introduction of ritual purity and impurity or pollution as well as ranking assigned to each one.

Still another thesis, related to origin and growth of castes, is that of the occupational affiliation or division of labour which has been greatly emphasized in sociological and social anthropoligical studies on the subject, though Ambedkar (1979: 47-48) considered it, with his substantive argument, as division of labourers. In a simplistic sense, as there existed differential forms of occupations, both-skilled and unskilled, pure and

impure, the labourers or the people performing these occupations either voluntarily or by traditions or birth were treated as separate castes, and were ranked higher and lower in the order or system. This thesis, not being convincing one, was criticised by Ambedkar (Ibid) on the ground that had the division of labour been the source as well as mechanism of origin and growth of castes and caste system, these could have equally been found in all the civilised societies of the world wherein 'division of labour is a necessary feature'. But this is not the case as the castes, with their system, are found only in India and nowhere else. Secondly, since a person changes his occupation at one time or the other (in most of the cases, the people have changed their traditional or caste specific occupations in the present time), his caste affiliation could also be changed but this has never happened. Hence, the division of labour or occupational pursuit could never be the basis and mechanism of genesis and growth of castes and the caste system as well.

The last thesis about the genesis, mechanism and growth of castes in India is related to the religious Sanskritic texts which subscribe to the view that all the four varnas of Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra—the four categories or classes of Aryans—were of the divine origin, of meeting of the Purusha (male) and the Prakiti-nature (female), or of the four organs-body parts of the Purusha himself. All the four varnas had to perform four distinct functions and were assigned specific ranks or statuses—higher and lower or superior and inferior, and any violation of these was subjected to punishment specially in the form of ex-communication. In the idiom of varna, if a male and a female of two different varnas had intimate relation and produced a child considered *varnashankar*—mixed breed, they as well as their progeny were thrown out of the either varnas. Such persons, with their progenies, formed caste or castes which could not be fitted in the varna scheme. As a critique of this thesis, it may be said that it does not stand on the logical argument as no creation of a living being is possible through the body organs other than the particular one. Then, this may be accepted as an

ideological legitimacy to the classification of population, in India, into various social categories or classes or varnas being higher and lower or pure and impure in the hierarchical scheme. Since the miscegenation or intimate sexual relation between males and females of two different classes or varnas has all along been discouraged and punished appropriately by the system, the condemnation of such persons, along with their progeny, and their formation of separate caste, can be accepted as a valid part of this thesis.

Anyway, it may be said here that there is no unanimity among the theses, cited above, on the mechanisms and growth of castes and caste system in India as each thesis emphasizes one mechanism and does not take cognigence of the other. Yet, one may agree that castes originated from tribe and its clan, within its totemic structure, through switching from exogamy to endogamy and getting legitimated by ideological elaboration at later stage. Such ideological elaboration was anchored in the divinity for the universal acceptance of castes and the caste system with the double check through enactment of specific rules and regulations relating to rewards and punishments to the adherents or practiceners and violators respectively. Such rewards and punishments were directed to the upward and downward movements as well as excommunications, in certain cases, of the persons and the groups concerned, within the status-scheme ranked higher and lower along the attributes of *guna* or quality, fate, rebirth, purity and impurity, superior and inferior occupation, etc. One thing is clear that the scheme was evolved by keeping in view the privation of some and deprivation of many in the matrix of the existing ranked statuses, and social interaction and social relations covered under it.

Caste System in South India: From Clan to Caste

In view of the traditional aspect of caste system, one is generally informed about the more rigidity of caste system, both in its structural and cultural forms, lived with by the people in south India. Such impression is not merely based on the heresay but is well substantiated by the scriptural

texts as well as similar literature written, in local languages, about the local folk-traditions, historiographic interpretations, ethnographic surveys, Census monographs and a few independent monographs, and research articles published by historians, and sociologists and social anthropologists on the society of the south Indian states. But more important issue is to know briefly whether caste system originated indigenously there or had travelled all the way from north to south India and got rigidified there with all its structural attributes as well as cultural practices with firm ideological grounding among the indigenous groups of the people. In doing this, it is also obliquely necessary to probe the possible reasons for the latter.

We have stated above that the castes originated simultaneously throughout India. There are, however, four distinctive views about the origin, mechanism and growth of castes and caste system in south India. The first view speaks of origin of caste or castes simultaneously in different parts of the country, including the peninsular India. For instance, Kosambi (1956 : 25) accepts the rules of endogamy as survival of the pre-Aryan or non-Aryan tribal practices in the Harappan civilization (around 2000 BC) and finds their fusion as the foundation of the caste system specially after the developed form of division of labour among the people, as mentioned above. But Kosmabi is silent on whether that had happened simultaneously in all or only in specific parts of the country. It is, however, clear from his elaborate narratives about the fusion of endogamy and its codified rules that he spoke more or exclusively of that in the northern India, and he covered, for the purpose, utmost the central and western India. Here, his arguments are inclusive of both the materialist and textual analysis of archaeological as well as living evidences found in these regions. The second view is of Klass (1998) who provides, on the contrary, an exclusive material basis for the origin of caste. As already stated, he speaks of a number of 'equalitarian' endogamous social groups (like those described by Kosambi) in the hunting and food gathering stage (pre-historic time) living in the numerous ecozones, but he does not call them

tribals. Later, these groups or atleast some of these succeeded in producing 'absolute surplus' of the food grains and, thus, were 'prosperous' compared to those engaged in producing or collecting food grains, forest produces, or hunted animals for their subsistence. These groups were also having equalitarian exogamous clans, constituting of a single 'marriage circle', and sharing together both prosperity and misfortune. But with the development of new agricultural technology, those groups which possessed cultivable land turned to be in advantageous position and the deprived ones became labourers to them at the communitarian (group) level. Thus, there emerged a hierarchical ranking of both the advantaged and the disadvantaged endogamous groups, with their exogamous clans, leading from 'clans to castes'.

But treating Kosambi's thesis as a tentative probing, Jaiswal (1998: 3) is of the view that the entry of the tribal groups into the 'general society' is a racial explanation of caste. According to her, if we accept this formulation that the different endogamous tribal groups (with their supposedly racial origin) formed castes or caste system, then it would have formed race or racial system and not the castes or caste system. Notwithstanding the tribe as a race, the origin of caste has also been attributed to tribe by N.K. Dutt (1986) who says that, "In this matter the aborigines (tribals) contributed more than the Aryans—The Aryans when they came into India had outgrown this stage of tribal economy, —From what we find among the non-Aryanised aborigines of India we can believe that the practices of totemistic exogamy and tribal endogamy were practically strong among the Dravidian—peoples of India, which kept the various tribes asunder like so many castes—Again, even before the coming of the Indo-Aryans, there had been great cultural differences among the natives of India, probably between the civilized Dravidians and the savages Pre-Dravidians, between men who dwelt in towns and forts and had well-developed political organization and systematized creeds, and men who still dwelt in forest and caves, and had not advanced beyond the hunting and fishing stage of culture. These differences had raised a wall of

separation between the two types, and each avoided contact with the other. These tribal and cultural divisions of society could not be shaken off by the natives even after their conquest by the Aryans, and under the changed circumstances they became hardened into caste divisions. Hence the curious fact that the caste rules are more rigid among the Dravidians of the south, not only between the Brahmans and non- Brahmans but between the various sections of the non-Brahmans, between the touchables and the untouchables, than among the more Aryan peoples of Northern India. Thus the practices of the conquered aborigines (tribals) contributed as much to the development of caste as the racial class prejudices of the Aryan conquerors" (pp.18-19). It is, thus, clear from this lengthy quotation that prior to the origin of castes and the caste system the various types of differences existed among the native or aboriginal or tribal people which supplemented and comple-mented to the origin and growth of the institution of caste introduced and legitimised by the Aryans in India over a period of time.

Similarly, Klass' formulation, as stated above, also does not hold ground as in many regions the tribals had a well developed peasantry but, at the same time, retained their distinct tribal social structure and identity, and had not transformed it into that of a caste. But in certain cases, some tribal groups transformed themselves into caste only after introduction of the Brahmanical culture and ideology (Jaiswal 1998: 5-6). We shall come to this a little later. We may, however, be tempted to accept, for the time-being, Klass' general formulation but this applies largely to the latter part of the colonial period upto the country's political independence, though the study of Nagaraju (1995: 8-23) supports, in a way, this formulation as the tribals of the Royalseema of south – western Andhra Pradesh gained tribal chieftaincies through their role in the wars between the Chalukyas and Pallavas in the eighth-ninth century A.D. Later, they adopted the *varna / jati* (caste) model and got adopted either at the middle or mostly at the lower level in the local caste-hierarchy. But it has also been said that a few castes found in the early south

Indian society were both structurally and culturally different from the Brahmanical institution of caste—with differential ranking and system of hierarchy based on the notion of purity and impurity or pollution. According to Gurukul (1995:245), "Most of the views in early historiography of south India confused the problem of caste by taking clan surnames for caste suffixes and juxtaposing them with the *varna* system. It has been clarified that the institution of caste was yet to characterize early Tamil (south Indian) society and what has been listed as castes by scholars in the past are clan names". Yet, like Kosambi, Klass also talks about the general process and ignores the regional specifications, including those found in the south Indian society.

But the most pertinent question may be raised about authenticity of the thesis of the tribal endogamy emphatically emphasized in both the above mentioned formulations. In fact, in absence of any authentication, these are either conjectural probings or extrapolations in view of the well accepted fact that at the initial stage of the societal evolution, human groups the world-over were living a primitive life or, even during the later ancient period, were not only exogamous but also matriarchal, though the matriarchy practiced among them was qualitatively different from that practiced till recently in the society of some south as well as north-eastern Indian states. It is also a fact that over a period of time matriarchy has been replaced by patriarchy and exogamy by endogamy. Even then, the reminiscences of the earlier practiced exogamy are strictly adhered to both among the castes and the tribes throughout the country as the marital alliance within the same *gotra* (clan) is a taboo and totally prohibited in both the cases. In fact, the remnants of clan are also found among most of the Dalits or Scheduled Castes in south India even in the forms of their avoidance of eating flesh of some reptiles such as tortoise, snakes and birds like crows, fowls, and revering and worshipping them. They also avoid cutting of a few trees, creepers, etc. All these are totems for them and they are supposedly originated from these, or these are treated as their siblings. The tribes and castes, including Scheduled Castes,

are discrete social segments and are originated from various clans which are "—named after or otherwise identified with a particular animal, plant or insect. They claim to be descended or otherwise derived from it (clan), and are customarily forbidden to eat the totemic object, although they are free to eat the totemic objects of sister groups of their own society" (Klass 1998: 138-139).

The third view about the origin and development of caste in south India relies again on clan but derives its strength exclusively from the ancient texts composed and compiled during the contemporary period. More precisely, most part of south India, i.e., *Tamilakam* was divided, during the ancient period, into five ecological or ecozones, which were known as *tinai*. These five tinais were the *Kurunchi* (hilly backwoods or forests) inhabited by the *vetars* and *kuruvars* or hunters and shifting enltivators, the *Palai* (parched areas) lived in by the *marwars* or warriors, the *Mullai* (pastoral tracks) occupied by the *itayars* or pastoralists, the *Marutam* (wetland) occupied and cultivated by the *ulavars* or ploughmen or agriculturists, and the *Neital* (the littoral or ponds) settled in by the *paratavar* or fishing community. But in those areas where two tinais merged, the people, with their respective social groups and forms of subsistence, appeared to be mixed (see, Gurukul 1994: 23; also Jaiswal 1998; 7-8). These were dominated by the tribal chiefdoms (Champaka-lakshmi 1995: 269). Besides the ecological and resultant material aspects, the ancient Tamil heroic poems, representing a people and their culture and social organisations as well as relations, were recited by a number of poets as a part of oral tradition of that period. Then, an academy of scholars collected and compiled these poems into ten anthologies, known as Sangam Literature, during the 300 B.C. to 300 A.C. According to Gurukul (1995: 242), these anthologies about the five *tinais* have also been accepted as efforts made towards "mechanical compartmentalization of nature into five divisions, symbolically denoting the historical evolution from the primitive to the civilized in south India". What is interesting to note here is that the people inhabited in the *tinais* were divided into several occupational groups and

were dependent on kins, except *Brahmin* households (which were different from the Brahman households of the Brahmanic tradition transplanted much later in south India) for production of agricultural and other goods. Not only the production of these goods overlapped in several *tinais* but there were also frequent movement and social interaction of people of one *tinai* to the other.

With regard to origin and growth of caste in these *tinais*, it is said that four *kutis* (castes) of *panam, paraiyan, tutiyan* and *katampan* existed in a *tinai* during the period of Sangam Literature but it has also been mentioned that a *kuti*, in reality, meant a settlement of people or a family of people, and not a caste. It has further been stated that the four castes of *parpar* (seers), *aracar* (kings), *itaiyar* (cowherds) and *Kuruvar* (hunters), and not the four stated above, were living in the *tinai*. Yet, at another place, other names of the four castes as *antanar, aracar, vanikar and velalar* have been mentioned. Even then, it has been clearly stated that these four castes were entirely different from the four castes or classes or *varnas* of the varna system, which were conceived and legitimised by the Brahmanic ideology in the north India (for details, see Gurukul 1995: 245-246).

Finally, the last view on the origin and growth of castes and caste system in south India derives its strength from the adaptation process. This means, the Brahmanical version of castes and caste system were adapted, from the north, in south India during the post-Sangam Literature period. This was, in other words, operative during the period of 400-600A.D. and during 600-900A.D., the period of the dynastic rules of the Pallavas and Pandyas.

Then, there were three specific menchanisms through which such adaptation was carried out. One, the earlier undertaken visits, from the north of the Jaina Shramanas and later of the Buddhist monks through the routes of the eastern coast, were directed towards spread of the message of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) but these also resulted in their cultural interaction with the people of the south. According to Thapar (1998: 132), visits of the Buddhist monks and cultural

interaction between them and the people of south were possible during the rein of Ashoka (268-232 B.C.), the Mauryan ruler. Since both the Jaina Shramans and the Buddhist monks were largely opposed to the Brahmanical caste system in the north, it was out of question of their carrying caste system with them to the south for the purpose of its induction there, though they had their establishments (*mathas, viharas*) there. But it is also stated that several traders from the north travelled later, through this route, to the south and carried castes and caste system with them and transplanted these over there through their interaction with the local people. Both castes and caste system in south India subsequently got legitimacy by the local chieftains or rulers of the local regions.

The same or similar trades and commerce mechanism of origin and growth of castes and casts system in south India was through the route of the *Dakshinapatha* to the south during this period. This southern trade route of the *Dakshinapatha* was stretched from Magadha (in Bihar), the capital of the Mauryan empire, in the north upto Paithan at the north of the river Godavari in Deccan in the south via Kashi (Banaras or Varanasi), Ujjaini (present Ujjain) and Maheshwar at the bank of river Narmada, Bhilsa (now a district) in Madhya Pradesh. More specifically, Paithan-the southern end of the *Dakshinapatha*, was located in the southern part of present Maharashtra bordering north of Karnataka. But interestingly, the *Dakshinapatha* never touched the south-rather southern Karnataka and deep south, the Tamil country. According to Thapar (1999:120), "The route was not only a channel of communication between north and south but also the vangruard of the exploration of the (southern) peninsula by the states of the north, intensified under the Mauryas". Also, through this route, the trades in shells, diamonds, precious stones, pearls and gold were carried out (Ray 1995:143). However, for the purpose of the present discussion, the *Dakshinapatha* was important in terms of penetration of the Brahmanical form of caste, along with its systemic arrangements, culture, customs and rituals, and religious legitimacy during the Maurya regimes, as mentioned above.

In other words, the traders from the north were castemen and believers of the Brahmanical caste and religious ideology. Hence, they had played significant role in induction of the Brahmanical caste system in the south. It first got its anchorage in the Kanarese country (the present day Karnataka) from where it spread to Tamil country consisting of major part of the present Tamil Nadu, southern part of Kerala in the west, and the west of Andhra Pradesh in the north-west. Besides the traders reached to south India through both the routes, a few Brahmins from the north were also persuaded by the local rulers to travel over there during this period perhaps initially to perform certain religious rituals and later to introduce the caste system with the Brahmanic ideology under the state patronage. Thus, the Brahmanical form of castes and caste system had reached there through both the eastcoast and the *Dakshinapatha* during this period and got crystallised there upto the beginning the medieval period.

The second mechanism of adaptation of the Brahmanical caste system in south India was rooted in the Hindu religious sects and cults formed and practiced in the north. According to Kosambi (1962:82-109), specially the Mother-Goddess cult had spread though the primilive tracks (hilly regions and forests) of the *Dakshinapatha* and the trade routes. The forms or names of the Mother Goddess were different at various places, which varied from the Maritai to the Mariamma and likewise. These names were obviously different from those in north India but the forms of their reverence and worship were, more or less, similar every where. But his analysis is more about the north than the south, and in the case of south it goes utmost to the Deccan, through the *Dakshinapatha*—the southern trade route, and not beyond that. However, a number of Shaivite and even Vaishnavite sects already spread by that time over major parts of south India, and the Virasaivas of Karnataka, adopted obviously from the north, had attacked the Jaina Sharmanas, the images of Mahavira Jaina, and the establishments set in his name from the seventh century onwards (Thapar 1999: 73). This was equally true in the case of the images of the Buddha, and the *Viharas* set up for the

Buddhist monks during that period. The Brahmins, travelled from the north to the south, had also started *yajnas* (sacrifices of animals and forest produces) on the Rigvedic patterns. All these together were instrumental in introduction, and adaptation of the Brahmin form of the castes and the caste system, first in the northern part and then in the entire south India during the 300- 600 A.D. and even till the later period, as stated earlier.

The third and final mechanism through which the caste system spread throughout south India is related to the Aryan or Hindu religious scriptures especially the epics like *Ramayana* written, in the major vernacular languages of the region, during the early period of the first millennium A.D. These scriptures were mainly supportive of the Brahmanic philosophical traditions(s), culture, religious rituals and rites, vegetarianism, etc. Moreover, these legitimised and installed the Brahmanic system of castes and *varnas* with well-knit ideology and hierarchy of pure and impure as well as of superior and inferior or higher and lower ranks of both varnas and castes, enthroning obviously the Brahmins at the top and the Shudras, including Untouchables, at the bottom of the vertical scale. It may, however, not be agreed that the scheme of ranking of the local population on the north Indian model was a smooth sailing there without any dissention or resentment, as stated earlier. Yet, the ideological induction of varnas and castes was well accepted which continues even in the present times, of course, with regional specification of ranks or ordering of statuses of different castes and their sub-castes.

Tribe-caste Continuum

Keeping aside the pre-tribe and post-caste social formations, focus of our discussion, in this section, is on the process of continuous change, along with change in the nature of the process itself, from tribe to caste over the passage of the historical evolution of the society specially in south India. The continuum hypothesis, opposed to that of the dichotomy, proceeds with the premise that the two extreme poles or points or stages on a given scale remain constant, and the continuous

changes occur from one stage to the other without any abruption. Such changes also occur along the consistent parameters broadly drawn from the socio-cultural attributes or characteristics of the societies supposedly prevalent at both the extreme stages or poles. Another important point to mention here is that it is assumed in the continuum hypothesis, that through the passage of the continuous changes, the society, with its distinct socio-cultural attributes or characteristics, of the first stage foregoes completely its existence and is replaced by another advance form of society evolved at the subsequent stage. But the gradation of change or form of changes at the stages located in between the two extreme stages is continuous, i.e., every subsequent grade or form of change is necessarily superior or advance to the previous one. Anyway, without going into the criticality or validity vis-à-vis invalidity of the hypothesis, which emphasizes change in the unilinear direction, we may accept it at its face-value but subscribe to the view that some socio-cultural attributes or characteristics of the first stage are always present through the continuum process and are distinctively visible along with those found at every subsequent pole or stage, irrespective of whether these are viewed as significant or insignificant. It is, however, equally true that through the passage, these characteristics or attributes themselves undergo both qualitative and quantitative changes or alterations to the degree of their permeability and acceptability at the extreme or 'last' stage.

In the previous section, we have discussed, in details, the formation of caste from tribe specially in the ancient south India. Since the focus of our discussion has been on the formation of castes and caste system from tribe, we have undermined the presence of certain attributes or characteristics or elements of tribe in the caste, and have also not as-certained the side by side existence of the tribe there. Yet, as our immediate concern, in this section, is to trace the tribe-caste continuum not in the ancient past but in the immediate present day society and culture in general and among the Scheduled Castes in particular enumerated there, we shall accept latter

as an example to verify the validity of the tribe-caste continuum hypothesis. More specifically, we shall examine how the various Scheduled Castes in south India live, even today, with certain socio-cultural attributes or characteristics of tribe, in spite of their being an integral part of the Hindu caste society, though placed at the lowest rank of its hierarchy. But before doing that, it would be necessary to have an overview of the validity of this hypothesis in the larger context of the continuum of tribal elements in the caste as perceived by a few social scientists in India. Also, contrary to the two extreme stages being polar opposite or the separate monolithic hole, we have to accept them as being diversified at their existential levels, though this latter one may not be relevant for the present discussion.

For present discussion, both tribe and caste, having separate social and cultural institutions and systemic arrangements, may be placed at the two extreme poles or stages of the continuum hypothesis. There are a few sociological, social anthropological and historical studies on the relationship between tribe and caste in India. Some have talked about change or transformation of tribe or tribal clan, as a unit, into caste (Beteille 1997: 57-78; Klass 1998) but through transformation to lineage to hereditary occupations (Gurukul 1993-1994) in ancient period, absorption of tribe into caste through the beliefs in purity-pollution as well as hierarchy consisting of higher and lower ranks (Bose 1994), tribe-caste interaction, tribe in transition (Majumdar 1937), tribals as backward Hindus (Ghurye 1963), tribe-caste convergence (Bara 2002), etc. Without explaining the merits and demerits or strong and weak points of these formulations, we may state here that these indirectly endorse, either fully or partially, the continuum hypothesis, though not referring to it. Yet, the point relevant here is that those tribes or their segments, who were absorbed especially at the lower or lowest level in the caste system through the passage of historical evolution, have not asserted for reviving their tribal identity or even elements of that unlike those tribes who have remained out of the caste-fold. Moreover, the former ones have formally been absorbed

in the caste system but they substantially retain some attributes or characteristics of tribes along with those of castes, even after thousands of years of their leaving the tribal-fold. Thus, the tribe-caste continuum hypothesis is fully 'valid' in these cases, yet its full validity would be proved only when the socio-cultural attributes of tribes such as the structure of social control and the rituals and belief systems are completely absent among the castes.

The above point can easily be substantiated by giving examples of a few Scheduled Castes from south India. Almost all the Scheduled Castes there maintain the traditional caste *panchayat* (council) headed by the elderly members of the respective castes. The caste *panchayat*, in its structural organisation and functions, resembles with the tribal *panchayat* whose membership is obligatory or is accorded by birth for men of the respective caste or tribe. Such *panchayat* has traditionally been an effective mechanism for exerting social control especially over those members who violate the caste norms or indulge in such activities which bring disgrace to the caste. Yet, the forms of social control imposed by the caste *panchayat* over the deviants are temporal and worth compliance, and some of these are temporary excommunication or social boycott-throwing away from the caste but revoking that after paying the imposed fine, undergoing purification ceremony and hosting the caste or community feast. It is also a fact that the caste *panchayat* has traditionally been operative as an effective mechanism of social control among the Scheduled Castes as well as the Shudra castes or the Other Backward Classes or Castes. Since it has proved to be less or even least effective mechanism among the younger educated generation of the Scheduled Castes and also the Shudra castes who are socially and economically better and more powerful compared to the former ones, it also suggests that even upper castes, not only in south India but all over the country, might have adopted caste *panchayat* as a mechanism for controlling deviances in the respective caste but discarded it earlier, through the passage of time, to make them distinctive from the castes placed at the middle and lower ranks in the local

caste-hierarchy. In other words, the process of casteisation from tribe, initiated much earlier among them, may be accepted as complete one compared to of that of the lower castes.

Another consistent parameter of the continuum between tribe and caste in the case of Scheduled Castes in south India is a set of customs related to their life cycle, and their religious beliefs and practices. Some of their customs are related to birth, marriage and death in the family, and their religious beliefs and practices pertain to reverence and worship of local deities, gods and goddesses, ancestors, totems symbolising clans, etc. While a few sets of customs, and religious beliefs and practices are those prescribed to the caste and are drawn from the wider Hindu pantheon, others are necessarily anchored in the tribal system though perhaps with their modified forms. For instance, the separate huts prepared by the maternal uncle for and an elaborate celebration of the first puberty of girls among some Scheduled Castes such as Dakkal/Dokkalwar, Dhor, Ghási, Haddi/Chachati/Sapru, etc. in Andhra Pradesh; Adiya of the Coorg district, Ajila/ Nalkadaya/Nalakeyava, Aray Mala, Arunthathiyar, Banjara and Lambaini, etc. in Karnatka; Bandi, Bellara, Chamar or Muchi, etc. in Kerala; and Bharatar/Parvan, Mannan/ Pathiyan/Perumennan/Vannan/Velan, Thoti, Paky, etc. in Tamil Nadu. These are remnants of the earlier customs of tribals of the respective areas. In the case of marriage ceremony also, most of the Scheduled Castes, in south India, follow the customs, rituals and ceremonies which largely resemble those of the erstwhile tribal customs. For instance, payment of nominal bride-price, marriage through elopement, widow remarriage, etc. are some of the marriage customs and practices which remained within the confinement of the tribals of the regions and which are still followed by some of the Scheduled Castes there.

Thus, the religious beliefs and cultural practices, which are remnants of tribes and are presently found among many Scheduled Castes in south India, are not outcome of the tribe-caste interaction but of continuum. This simply means that these Scheduled Castes were initially tribe and got absorbed

in the caste system at some later stage. More specifically, some of their religious beliefs and cultural practices, which they adhered to even in the present time, are their reverence and worshipping of village and regional deities like Maramma or Mariamma, Ponniamma, faith in omens, demon-worship, pacification of ghosts and spirits through reverence and worship, devil dances, sacrifices of goats and fowls, playing musical instruments, on festive occasion, made up of animals or forest animals, ancestor-worship and so on and so forth. Since they are Hinduised and part and parcel of the Hindu caste system, they are also staunch believers of gods and goddesses of the wider Hindu pantheon. Even they celebrate Hindu festivals of a calendrical year and other auspicious occasions like or along with other caste people of their respective regions.

Untouchablity and the Untouchables in South India

Before we attempt to trace the period and involved mechanism of origin of untouchability in general and in south India in particular, it is necessary to distinguish, at the conceptual level, between untouchability and impurity or pollution or defilement, which are often mixed up and used synonymously. The notion of pollution or impurity stands opposite to purity and is generally used for the temporary defilement, which can easily be removed through performing some purificatory rituals. Contrary to it, purity is an abstract notion or entity that remains merely a point of reference and exists only in degrees, alongwith certain defining elements or attributes or substances. Unlike the dominant view attributing to the notion of purity to have ever worked as the guiding principle in situating an object or a person or a group or community in the Indian culture and civilisation in general and in the Hindu caste system in particular, it is the impurity which, in actuality, has all along enjoyed primacy or absolute authority over purity in terms of determining varying degrees of the former. Louis Dumont (1974) also has placed both pure and impure as binary opposites, which simply means that these exist as a paired concepts and the purity is necessarily opposed

to impurity. He has stated further that, "... in the setting of the opposition between pure and impure, the religious division of labour goes hand in hand with the permanent attribution to certain professions of a certain level of purity. From this it should not be inferred that the religious division of labour cannot arise in another setting" (p.49). Thus, he has finally said that the two poles—the Brahmins (pure) and the Untouchables (impure) are equally necessary, though both being located at an unequal levels, simply to maintain for (even of) others because "—the execution of impure tasks by some is necessary" (Ibid: 55). This implies that the two—the Brahmin (pure) and the Untouchable (impure), being inflexible or rigid extreme poles, for Bailey (1963), are not only necessary but complimentary to each other in terms of their functionality—of course the former's function being considered superior to that of the latter. This is what Dumont also has called complimentarity between pure and impure (pp. 53-53). But his understanding of complimentarity of the two is partial and partisan wherein the Untouchable takes away the temporary impurity of the Brahmin, who for Dumont is never impure permanently, by removing his dirts, and the Brahmin, in turn, removes the Untouchable's notional impurity temporarily by prescribing specific purificatory rituals for him. But as in his scheme of thought the Untouchable is permanently impure, removal of his impurity, even temporarily, does not arise. It is the people of the non-Brahmin castes, other than the Untouchables, whose temporary impurity or defilement is to be removed through the ritual purification. However, there exists a duality in relationship between the temporary impurity of the pure and the permanent impurity or untouchability of impure in the sense that the touch of the latter to the former makes it impure only temporarily and not permanently, whereas the temporary impurity and not the permanent impurity of the latter one is removed only temporarily through undergoing some purificatory rituals prescribed by the former, as stated above. This implies that the existing contradiction between the two soon needs to be removed.

Thus, in the words of Dumont, ".... the (permanent) impurity of the Untouchable is conceptually inseparate from the purity of the Brahmin. They must have been established together, or in any case have mutually reinforced each other, and we must get used to think of them together" (1974:54). But, as stated above, such relationship between the two is not complimentary relationship in strict sense of the term; instead, it is some sort of working relationship as the former exists only among the equals or near equals, and not among those who are placed at the two extreme positions in the system—here caste system. Moreso, as the Brahmin has an absolute 'repulsion' or repulsive attitude and behaviour towards as well as complete 'separation' from the Untouchable (for details, see Bougle 1971), the complimentarity between the two is not possible. It may, however, be mentioned here that Dumont's understanding of complimentarity between purity and impurity simply explains the presence of the two in which they exist as autonomous entity without their being co-related, i.e., less impurity means more purity. But in actuality, it is impurity which provides purity to certain object or person by absorbing its/his impurity in itself. Hence, the centre or rallying point is impurity and not purity, as located in the mind-set of the Hindus as well as of the social scientists such as Louis Dumont. Contrary to this, in their understanding the central reference in the status ranking of castes in the caste hierarchy is the purity-the Brahmin, irrespective of his impurity of temporary nature as well as all sorts of vices, for defining and determining the rank position of rest of the castes in the caste system (for details, see Mandelbaum 1972).

On the other hand, the permanent impurity in the institutionalised form is untouchability, which is hereditarily attached with an individual as well as with his/her caste or community. Moreso, it is attached with a caste or community; and as an individual, in Indian society especially in the Hindu social system, is an inherent part or a member of it by birth, the untouchability is inevitably transmitted to him or her from generation to generation even if that individual is far away from the ambit of the criteria applied for determining the

nature and magnitude of the permanent impurity or untouchability. In other words, once the members of that caste are made to be associated temporarily with impure occupation or to deal with an impure object on some occasion(s), they are considered to be impure forever, unlike the Brahmins and others who remain impure temporally. Even if they dissociate themselves from that, the stigma of their occasional impurity or untouchability remains forever simply because of their membership with their caste labelled as impure and untouchable. This simply means that, it is not the association with impure occupation or touch with an impure object which makes a person an untouchable but it is his/her membership with a caste which is treated as an untouchable caste forever. This also means that, unlike the temporary impurity, the permanent impurity or untouchability is not easily removable due to its institutionalised form as a socio-religious institution does not easily die down. It is, therefore, to be abolished both legally and socially, and legally it has already been done away by the Constitution of India.

Our intension in doing somewhat elaborate analysis, at the outset of this section, of the purity and impurity, including untouchability, is simply to demonstrate the fact that the ancient society in both north and south India was consisted of the numerous tribes in which there was no sign of permanent impurity or untouchability in the day-to-day life of the people, though the temporary impurity had existed there. Since the caste as well as caste system emerged and some adoption of that from the north was made in south India during the later part of that period, untouchability originated and it not only got associated with certain types of occupations and other related practices and customs but also those, who pursued and practiced these, were classified into separate caste groups and treated as Untouchables. To make this simple generalisation into somewhat complex analysis, it may be said that the tribals in India practice, even today, some forms of impurity based on violation of certain totems and taboos, customs and rituals, religious practices, observance of purity on life related occasions such as birth, menstruation, death,

etc. This is not to be construed as juxtaposition of the present over the past or of caste traits to that in tribe, but such practices had prevailed among the tribals even in the remotest past or the early ancient period in Indian society—both in north and south – as is evident from the interpretations of the archeological excavations and the historiogra-phical explanations of life of the people of that period. Their such practice of impurity and purity was both structurally and functionally different from the permanent impurity or untouchability associated with certain groups of people during the later part of the ancient period of evolution and growth of society in south India.

The Dalits or Untouchables have a long history of their origin and that of their untouchability and other forms of discrimination, exploitation and subjugation. One may argue that both the untouchables and their untouchability are synonymous and they originated together, though Ambedkar (1990:237-379; see also Thapar 1999) differs in this regard. Such argument is certainly attuned to a thesis of the simultaneous origin of four varnas or classes or castes from the divine power. Keeping aside the mystic origin of the institution of varna or caste or, by extension, even of untouchables and their untouchability, we shall discuss below a few theses, which are universally applicable to the origin and mechanism of untouchability both in north and south India. The thesis of Ambedkar, with inherent empirical evidence, of the origin of untouchability is that it originated sometimes during the 4th century A.D., and was an outcome of the last reconciliation arrived at between the settled communities of the Aryans, divided into the four varnas or classes of Brahmin, Kshatriya or Rajanya, Vaishya and Shudra, and the broken men who were primitive tribes and virtually outside the system of the settled communities (see, Ambedkar 1990). That means, there were already a class of people—the broken men or the unsettled communities who were living as wanderers or people with unsettled life. Because of the unavoidable situational compulsion on part of both the settled communities and the wanderers as well as more vulnerability of the latter, the

reconciliation took place. This resulted into the subordinated co-option of the broken men and imposition of the various types of ignominies on them by people of the settled communities. Also, they were to live in separate yet nearby settlement and were part-apart of the social arrangement of the already settled communities (Ibid). In other words, they were, in principle, not part of the socio-religious or ritual hierarchy of people of the settled communities but were dependent on them for rendering their labour and earning livelihood from that. Vivekanand Jha (1975:14-31) has opined that though untouchability began to take 'firm and definite shape with respect to a few groups' upto 2nd century A.D., it was present even during the Vedic period. In fact, he has mentioned about four phases in the early history of untuchables: the first phase ending upto 600 B.C. with a number of tabooed sections of society during the Vedic period; the second phase extending upto 2nd century A.D.; the third phase ended by 600 A.D. during which the practice of untouchability was intensified but it was also resisted by the untouchables themselves; and the fourth phase extended upto 1200A.D. and beyond during which the ranks of the untouchables swelled by incorporating several other castes, and untouchability reached at its peak (p. 31). But the trouble with such formulation is that it is all based on the Hindu religious texts, leaving no ground for empirical verification except their reinterpretations and reformulation of the thesis as there seems to be absence of unonymity among the early such texts on the subject.

Still another thesis, which could be, in a way, an extended derivation of the first one, is that the Shudras, last or the fourth of the four varnas, were divided into *Sat* (with substance or cleanliness) and *Asat* (without substance or uncleanliness) or Shudra and Ati-Shudra classes or categories. Members of the first category were engaged in clean and of the second in unclean types of occupations. Those engaged in the unclean occupations were termed untouchables and the first one were regarded clean castes but below the Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishya or the merchants and traders. Though this thesis is

very much in the line of origin of caste or castes from labour or occupation and, hence, origin of the caste system based on the division of labour, but the trouble with it is that it fails to get ground in event of absence of caste or caste system in non-Hindu society wherein division of labour, in the form of clean and unclean occupations, is inevitably present. It also ignores the fact that religion-in the form of unconditional faith in supernatural power, and the related notion of ritual purity and pollution has remained the sole basis of binding together the traditional society in India. Secondly, it fails to ascertain the issue of when, why and how the Shudras got divided into *Sat* and *Asat* or Shudra and Ati-Shudra groups or categories, and whether the socio-religious ignominies were imposed on the *Asat* Shudras only or on both the *Sat* and *Asat* Shudras, as prescribed primarily in the Manusmriti compiled during the 2nd century A.D. Related to this are two different views: one, the socio-religious ignominies were imposed on the Shudras—a category or varna of people as such, irrespective of their sub-groups or categories. Two, this view holds ground as there seems to be absence of such categorisation at the level of self-conscious assertion before the mid of 19th century. Although during the later part of the 19th century Jotirao Phule tried to bring both the Shudras and Ati-Shudras or *Sat* and *Asat* Shudras together on account of commonality of their exploitation by and their subjugation and subordination to the people of upper castes, their such categorisation has remained distinctive till date in spite of the sporadic efforts made for bringing them to a common political platform. Such efforts manifest, at present, in the form of Dalit Bahujan or Bahujan Samaj, and remain a mere rhetoric or political articulation in absence of socio-cultural inter-mixing of the Dalit castes and the Other Backward Castes or Classes. In fact, the distinction between the Shudras and the Ati-Shudras or the Other Backward Classes or castes and the Untouchables or the Scheduled Castes or Dalits has sharpened during all these years due to unwanted super-imposition of former over the latter. This has happened due to the fact that after acquiring economic and political dominance, the Other Backward Castes have undergone

through the process of Sanskritisation (Srinivas 1966) by claiming their notional ritual superiority and newly acquired economic and political dominance over the Dalit castes. Their such economic and political dominance and caste status superiority has often manifested in their practicing untouchability, and committing heinous forms of physical violence and atrocities on the Dalits, especially in rural areas.

Retrospectively, the relevant question to be asked here is that why were the various forms of social and religious ignominies imposed on the broken men or the Shudras, specially the *Asat* category of Shudras, after their co-option in the settled life of Aryans? What was responsible for that-was it their impressed need of getting co-opted in the settled life at any cost or was it their vulnerable economic position of living, as a wanderer, with unsettled life? Or, was the continued risk to their life from the bewilderness or some other reason responsible for that? From the *status-quoist* point of view, since there was functional necessity of someones to render free labour and perform the most degraded menial jobs for the settled people, the broken men or the Ati-Shudras (of course, this nomenclature emerged much later after their 'co-option' in the system) were co-opted for the purpose at the cost of their getting located them at the reasonable physical and socio-religious distance. But such view-point does not explain why the various forms of social and religious ignominies or disabilities, practiced in the form of untouchability—the severest form of ignominies, were imposed on them once they agreed to get co-opted in the system of the settled people. That means, there could have been some other valid reason for the same. In fact, Ambedkar has provided the most justified reason for it. Accepting both the settled communities and the broken men initially being members of the primitive society and living life of the nomadic tribes and the former getting transformed into settled communities earlier, Ambedkar has stated that, "When some (nomadic)tribes became settled, the tribes that remained nomadic found more advantageous to concentrate their fight against the settled tribes. It was more paying than a war

against other Nomadic tribes. The Nomadic tribes had come to realize that the Settled tribes were doubly wealthy. Like the Nomadic tribes, they had cattle. But in addition to cattle, they had corn which the Nomadic tribes had not and which they greatly coveted. The Nomatic tribes systematically organised raids on the Settled tribes with the object of stealing the wealth belonging to the Settled tribes. The third fact is that the Settled tribes were greatly handicapped in defending themselves against these raiders. Being engaged in more gainful occupation, the Settled tribes could not always convert their ploughs into swords. Nor could they leave their homes (and their lands and crops as well as cattle) and go in pursuit of the raiding tribes" (1990:275).

Hence, there was a compromise between the tribes, with the settled life, and those tribes who were living the nomadic life. Since the settled tribes wanted to live peaceful life through finding new defenders and the nomadic tribes were also tired of their continuous raids on the settled tribes and wanted to live with the settled life, the compromise was beneficial to both of them. But the latter, being raiders on the former, had to pay the cost in terms of being asked to get settled at a distance from the main settlement and also getting various types of social and religious ignominies imposed on them, including the practice of untouchability against them which came in existence much later. Ambedkar has further stated that the practice of untouchability against these nomatic tribes or broken men, with their late settled life, started sometimes in the 4th century A.D. because they had accepted Buddhism, opposed to Hinduism, and continued to eat beef-the flesh of the dead cattle, which the earlier settlers, the Hindus, had already left. That means it was contempt of the Hindus against these Buddhists which caused the practice of untouchability against them (Ambedkar 1990: 311-320).

With the above theoretical explanations, it is imperative here to venture into the origin and growth as well as adopted mechanism (s) of untouchability in south India. More precisely, we wish to probe when and how it originated, grew and got institutionalised there. Whether the same mechanism (s), as

suggested by Ambedkar, worked for that or some others were operative, which were entirely different from that in north India. Then, with regard to origin and mechanism of untouchability in south India, particularly in Tamil society, Subrahmanian (1997:154) makes sweeping narratives by saying that in the process of Dravidianisation (with the Dravidians coming from outside the land during the most ancient period) "...the aboriginal tribes, the primitive people, were driven to the hills and the more amenable ones reduced to a state of helotry. The practice of untouchability and habit of treating one part of the society as 'low class' (*ilicinar*) prevailed there as it did in the north. There is no reason to suppose that untouchability was introduced into Tamil Nadu by immigrants from the north; it was a cultivated attitude of supreme snobbery (of the superior towards the inferior ones) which obtained in both places"—north and south India. To substantiate his argument, he gives the examples of the Kuruvar, Panar, Paraiyar (Pariah), Tutiyar, etc, listed now as the Scheduled Castes, who were considered the 'low class' people in south India. A point may be mentioned here that as the helotry universally remained an outcome of a considerable degree of resistance and subsequent defeat of a native people to the invaders, the helots or slaves had always to face the contempt of attitude and behaviour of the victorious ones. Hence, it was not the snobbery but contempt of the winners towards the defeated ones in the game, which was in the root of the origin of untouchability in south India. This, in a way, also supports Ambedkar's thesis (1990) of the origin of untouchability sometimes during the 4th century A.D. but not in the too remote period of evolution of society in south India, as suggested by Subrahmanian. This is supported even by Thapar's brief mention about untouchability in south India in her relating it to the persecution of the Jaina *Shramanas* and the Buddhist monks, since the 7th century A.D. onwards, by the Saivites. In her own words, "Untouchability was also a form of religious persecution (like persecution of the Broken Men or some primitive tribes—the Buddhists in Ambedkar's thesis), for this exclusion was common to Brahmanism as well

as to some Sramanic sects, the candala (Chandala) being a category apart" (Thapar 1999:74). With whatever period and the involved mechanism of its origin, the untouchability had got institutionalised even in rural Tamil Nadu and other parts of south India during the period of Rajaraja I, the Chola King, who had ruled the Chola-Mandalam, the territory from the Kaveri delta to the extreme south of the Indian peninsula, from 985 to 1016 A.D. (Karashima 1997: 21- 30).

We may enquire, at this stage, into the question whether both the Untouchables and their untouchability in south India originated simultaneously or the former had originated earlier and the latter got associated with them afterward. We will deal with this question by examining, first, their origin in Indian society as such and, then, attempt to trace that in the case of south India. The reference may again be made here of Ambedkar's (1990) thesis of the Broken Men who had existed in the form of a section of the Primitive Tribes since the early age. They were not only Buddhist in their faith but were also eating beef (flesh of the dead animals), which the settled tribes had already left. Since both the Broken Men and people of the settled tribes reconciled due to their situational compulsion, the latter developed hatred and contempt against the former, who had not accepted initially the faith and the cultural practices of the settled tribes. Rather, a large section of the Broken Men continued to eat beef even after the reconciliation not because of their habit but simply because of lack of a stable source of their earning and utter poverty. Needless to say that they had to face the highest degree of hatred and contempt of the settled tribes for their continuing beef-eating and believing in Buddhism.

At the regional level, particularly in the case of south India, Subrahmanian (1997: 198-206) has stated that the local purohitars (Purohits), rulers, merchants and labourers could be roughly equated with the classical four classes or *varnas* of Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra of the Aryavarta situated in the north-western part of north India. Then, during the ancient period (300 B.C.-600 A.D.) in south India, other communities were the Eyinar (hunters), the Umanar (the salt

sellers), the Marawar (the martial community), the Konar, Itaiyar (cow-herds), the Utavar (peasants), the Valainar (fishermen), the Kuyavar (potter), and the Ilicinar (the low class or low caste people), besides a few other categories of people who were associated with the low level uncleaned occupations or manual works, and the numerous tribes. It is the last category of people—the Ilicinar whom he has considered the Untouchable, who lived in their segregated *Cheris* (localities or settlements or hamlets) in both the rural and urban areas. But what is interesting to mention here that in his entire narratives, Subrahmanian does not explain how and exactly when the Ilicinars and their untouchability had originated, except his inference from their association with the unclean occupations.

There seems to be no unanimity among the scholars, specially historians, on the exact or even approximate date and involved mechanism about origin of the Untouchables and their untouchability in south India. Hence, we are left with two options: one, since castes and the caste system originated there from the numerous tribes and their social relations over generations during the ancient period, these got crystallised and revitalised at a later stage due to justification from the Brahmanical social order based on the notions of purity-pollution and superior-inferior ranks, adopted from the north India. Accordingly, not only the impurity or defilement was treated as permanent attributes of people of the inferior ranks but all their activities and associated objects were considered to be impure and defiling the pure and the superior ones. This all happened during the periods between 4th and 7th century A.D. Then, the second option with us is to accept the thesis that those considered to be impure had not accepted their imposed permanent impurity without showing a considerable degree of resistance to the superior ones with both power and ritual purity. Thus, they became victims of the winners in the game and thereby had to bear the maximum degree of hatred and contempt of the powerful ones. There could be numerous evidences to this effect, both before and after the 4th century A.D., but ironically

these have not been properly and systematically recorded by the historians, including those from the south India.

The Statutory Position of Scheduled Castes and Criteria for their Scheduling

The Scheduled Castes as a nomenclature for the erstwhile Depressed Classes appeared, for the first time, in the British Government of India Act 1935 where it was used for those Hindu castes, and their sections converted to Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, who were ostricised and exploited for centuries together. Consequently, the first order named *The Government of India (Scheduled Castes) Order* was issued in 1936 itself. But in what concrete manner the ostricisation as well as exploitation of the Depressed Classes was spelt out and how many castes from all over the country were included in the Schedule or list at that time and in subsequent years is not easily known at this stage. Yet, perhaps the same criteria, along with more emphasis on the practice of untouchability, were adopted in the Constitution of free India, and the list provided by the states was approved by the President of India. The first such order named *The Constitution (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) Order*, with the assent of the President, was issued in 1950 itself, which was modified as *The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Order (Amendment) Act*, 1976. The latest amendment as *The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order (Amendment) Act 1990* also includes those scheduled castes who have converted to Buddhism.

As stated above, we may also explore briefly here some of the socio-demographic criteria for inclusion of certain castes in the Schedule or list of the Scheduled Castes, particularly in south India. But before that it is necessary to have a look at the number of castes included in the list of Scheduled Castes (SCs) in south India, consisting of four states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, and the union territory of Pondicherry. Going at the face or the mere number, there are 60 castes in Andhra Pradesh, 102 castes in Karnataka, 69 castes in Kerala, 75 castes in Tamil Nadu and only 16 castes in Pondicherry included in the list of the Scheduled Castes in

these states and the union territory. Thus, the total number of the Scheduled Castes in south India has remained 322 in 2001. Hardly any new caste (s) from any state or the union territory in south India has been included in the list of the Scheduled Castes there in the recent year. But it is also true that a number of Scheduled Castes notified in one state are also the notified even in other state or states and in the union territory. For instance, the Adi Andhra and the Adi Dravida, which are originally found in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu respectively, have been notified in all the four states and in the union territory of Pondicherry. Similarly, there are a sizeable number of castes which have been notified as the Scheduled Castes in all the four states or in three states and in the union territory, a few others only in two states and in the union territory, and still a few castes only in two states. Thus, on an average, there are around 295 castes notified separately as Scheduled Castes in south India, although their exact number is only 112 only due to synonyms of a large number of Scheduled Castes in these states and the union territory. The total number of people of these castes, according to 2001 Census, in Andhra Pradesh is 1,23,39,496; in Karnataka 85,63,930; in Kerala 31,23,941; in Tamil Nadu 1,18,57,504; and in Pondicherry 1,57,771 persons. Hence, the total number of people belonging to all Scheduled Castes in south India is 3,60,42,642 persons and nearly 80 per cent of them live in rural areas.

Then, going by the socio-demographic criteria for notification of these castes as the Scheduled Castes in south India, we find that merely the size of population has not been taken into consideration, where a large number of population of a caste perhaps would amount pressure for getting it included in the list of the Scheduled Castes. It is evident from the fact that the total number of persons belonging to Scheduled Castes in Karnataka and Kerala is less than those in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu but the number of castes included in the list of the Scheduled Castes in the state of Karnataka is higher than that in these latter states. Similarly, if we take untouchability and various other forms of discrimination as

the criteria for listing a caste as the Scheduled Caste, then we also find that all the castes notified as Scheduled Castes in south India have not suffered from the stigma of untouchability even in the past. Some such castes are Bariki of Andhra Pradesh; Kakkalan of Kerala and Tamil Nadu; Maila and Mavilan of Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu; Koliyan and Vathiriyan of Tamil Nadu; and several such castes in these states. But in the case of all these castes, their population size is also less than 10,000 persons in the states where these are found. The majority of the castes smaller in population size (numbering 218), having less than 10,000 persons (large number of them having even less than 1000 persons) also do not have even effective leadership of their own to articulate the issue of and exert pressure for their inclusion in the list of the Scheduled Castes. Hence, instead of subscribing to the view of vagueness in the criteria adopted for the purpose, we emphasize here that a complexity of criteria are in operation for identifying and listing a caste as a Scheduled Caste in a state.

We have already stated in the earlier section that a number of tribes or a section of them had transformed into caste in south India even during later part of the colonial period, which could not be included in the list of the Scheduled Tribes. Since they had already Hinduised yet away from the traditional religious system of Hinduism as well as devoid of the practice of untouchability and other forms of discrimination, they largely remained socially and educationally backward. They also remained deprived of the dignified and sustenable self-resources of their livelihood. Had these castes come into closer contact with the caste Hindus, especially in the traditional system of *jajmani* (patron-client) relations, they would have certainly faced the frenzy of untouchability and other forms of discrimination. Hence, a relatively prolong isolation, and practice of untouchability as well as other forms of discrimina-tion, coupled with socio-economic and educational backwardness, have been the major criteria for notifying and listing a caste as Scheduled Caste. It is this socio-economic and educational backwardness, which

occasionally instigate some sections of caste Hindus or even upper castes to acquire false certificate of a Scheduled Caste and claim for the benefits of the provision of reservations, though they have never experienced any forms of untouchability and other related discriminations.

Ethnic Identity and Origin: Role of Myths

Generally speaking, the ethnicity as a concept has broad connotation, and is inclusive of caste, race (being now discouraged both in principle and in usage), class, religious affiliations, region, political ideology, etc. Being a cultural construct, it thus cuts across the caste, race, class, and religious, regional and political ideological boundaries and relies largely on the cultural markers like language, customs, food and dress patterns, festivals and alike, besides a strong emotional 'we feeling'. It has its own notional cultural and structural boundary within which members are supposed to pursue their varieties of activity, but in no way violative of its cultural code of conduct or the opinion of its leaders. Initially, an ethnic group or community originates in a particular region, with specific climatic environment, and then it moves out along with movement or migration of its members but it largely retains its cultural markers, and interacts as well as integrates with cultures of other host groups and communities. What is more important to mention here is that the members of an ethnic group or community invariably identify themselves with it, hence, their collective identity, though they may cherish a few more identities based on their individual achievements in the secular domain of life. Being originated initially in the European continent sometime during the 1960s and used for the immigrants from several countries, it has travelled since then to India also and is adopted frequently in the academic writings—particularly in a few social sciences like sociology and social anthropology, political science, history, etc. But in the case of India, it has also been used for castes and tribes where each caste or tribe has its own distinctive identity. Since castes have been arranged as superior and inferior on the basis of their ritual purity and impurity, in a specified hierarchy,

there are certainly a number of castes which are stigmatised with their impurity. Hence, their stigmatised caste or ethnic identity (Berremen 1979).

During the recent decades, specially after Independence of the country, members of the stigmatised castes or ethnic communities have been striving for overcoming the stigma of their collectivity (caste or ethnic community) as well as of their own. Since they are engaged in looking for alternative self and collective or group (caste) identity, they have been making use of two courses of action, rather social processes, which have remained in vogue in Indian society: one, making use of achievements in secular domains like education, caste-free occupations or white collar jobs (economic), and power or authority. But all these three, in actuality, do not replace or obliterate their traditionally stigmatised group or caste identity. This is to be understood in terms of what Ambedkar has said as early as in 1917 (see his 1979) wherein achievement or merit of an individual in the caste system goes along with the merit or demerit of his/her caste. As the lower castes have traditionally been attributed to demerit or non-achievement, the achievement or merit of their members has not yet succeeded in overcoming the stigma of their group or caste. As all the traditionally stigmatised castes have constitutionally been called the Scheduled Castes, with their traditional nomenclature being intact at the local level, the merit or achievement of their members is considered to be sponsored by the State through its policy of reservation or compensatory discrimination. On the other hand, the merit or achievement of the persons belonging to the non-stigmatised upper and middle level castes is considered to be their individual attribute, yet it has not motivated or inspired them to shelve their caste affiliation. In fact, the self and group or caste or collective identities of people belonging to both the stigmatised and non-stigmatised castes groups go hand in hand, in spite of some apparent changes occurred in the caste system in all these years.

The second option-course of action or process available to the members of the stigmatised castes or ethnic communities,

other than the achievement one, is myth related to the origin of their castes or communities. It is true that the myths are self created, but it is equally true that these are interpreted by the people in the manner that suits them. But these take longer time, rather centuries, to get them crystallised and then followed by the large section of population. Broadly speaking, myths are cultural attributes and markers of identity of a person or group or caste, and they play significant role in shaping one's personality as well as providing pride to him/her, besides his/her group (caste). Most of the myths in the caste system are generally anchored in the Hindu mythology and these centre around the personalities or mythological heros of high origin and their projected achievement. Hence, people of the lower castes also adopt them for the said purpose, though this process cannot be generalised at the universal plank. For instance, a large majority of the people of the lower castes in north, west, central and east India hardly believe in the Hindu myth about their origin or that of their castes. So also, they do not derive any inspiration from these for shaping their personality and targeting their achievement. At the most, they refer to the heroic historical personalities, particularly from their own caste or community, for their immediate gains in the secular domains of life and juxtapose that to their primordial affiliations or castes.

On the contrary, a majority of people of the lower castes (ex-untouchables) in south India have adopted several Hinduised myths to trace the origin of their castes, although their orientation towards secular achievement is hardly guided by that. In few cases, the name of their castes also go along with these myths. For instance, the Arundhatiyas / Aruntha-thiyars of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu trace their origin from Arundhati, a female goddess of the Hindu mythology. Similarly, the Jambuvulus of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry claim their descent from the *Rishi* (sage) Jambvant of the Hindu mythology. Likewise, Pallans or Pallars of Tamil Nadu, where their caste name is also known as Devendrakulathan, claim their ancestry from Devendra, the superior Indra of the Hindu

mythology, though they do not do so in Karnataka, Kerala, and Pondicherry where they are in minority or less in number. Besides, a sizeable number of Scheduled Castes in south India also claim their descent either from goddess Parvati, the wife of lord Shiva, or from the *Rishi* Jamdagni or lord Parashurama and a few others of the Hindu mythology. A point may be mentioned here that their such claimed ancestry does not go along with their claimed *gotras* who are generally revered at the time of mate selection or solemnisation of marriage. But they hardly remember their descent or ancestry in their daily routine. Further, quite a few scheduled castes in all the states and union territory in south India also follow the *gotras* and practice totems and taboos, which are either tribal in origin or at least resemble to that. This certainly contradicts their claimed decent from the Hindu mythology, though their belief system and cultural practices are largely drawn from the Hindu pantheon.

Still, one more process has remained at work, since the recent years, among the lower castes in south India. Quite a few such castes as Arundhatiya and Jambuvulu of Andhra Pradesh; Arunthathiyar, Chakkiliyan, Jambuvulu and Pallan of Karnataka; Arunthathiyar, Chakkiliyan and Pallan of Kerala; Arunthathiyar, Chakkiliyan, Jambuvulu and Pallan of Tamil Nadu; and Chakkiliyan, Jambuvulu and Pallan of Pondicherry have started adding *r* (letter of alphabet) at the end of their name. Thus, they call themselves Aundhatiyar or Arunthathiyar, Jambuvuluru, Chakkiliyar and Pallar as (or original) name of their castes particularly at the places of the origin. They do this to add respect to their castes like Aiyangar and Mudaliyar of upper castes; Chettiyar of trading castes; and Nadar, Thevar and Vellalar of the middle level peasant castes of south India, particularly of Tamil Nadu. Such minor addition to the castes' name or change of name of the castes, articulated by their socially and politically conscious members, certainly provides two advantages: one, supposedly it places the caste in relatively higher esteem of respectfulness in the local hierarchy of caste system. But unless it is reinforced by the adequate socio-economic and political dominance as well

as mobilisation of its members, it does not surve the purpose. Two, it inspires and motivates the members to achieve their worth in the secular domain of their life. However, in both the cases, the traditional low rank or status of caste and the stigmatised caste identity of its members often come in the way of defacing the prejudiced attitude and behaviour of the upper and the middle level castes as well as taking the socio-economic achievement and the assertion of the lower castes to the logical end. Hence, the present continuation of untouchability and infliction of violence vis-à-vis atrocities by the former against the latter in south India and elsewhere in the country, though the State often intervenes ineffectively through its police administration and judiciary.

Social Structure and Social Relations

It is often said that the caste system in south India is more rigid than elsewhere in the country. Though this needs to be empirically verified, a fact, however, may be stated here that the restructuration process of the earlier social system on the line of the Brahmanical system of castes vis-a-vis Varnas began in south India since the 6th or 7th century A.D. and continued till the beginning of the colonial rule. As stated earlier, a number of Brahmins from north India were inducted there who, in turn, helped the local rulers in the process by providing the considerable degree of legitimacy and justification through the existing *Dharmashastras* and even creating or writing new sets of Sanskritic literature for the purpose. All this means that as the caste system or the Brahmanical caste system in south India is newer in its origin and structuration than that in north India, its relatively more rigidity is to be there compared to that elsewhere in the country. The caste system has been functioning there through all these years with its 'demonstration effect'. Since our concern here is to look at the nature of the existing social structure, inclusive of economic and political structures, in south India and the type of social relations among people of the various castes there, we shall briefly examine that, especially the one, which has come into being since the mid of the colonial rule in India.

Generally speaking, social structure, being abstract at the conceptual level, manifests concretely in the forms of various institutions, organisations, and roles and relations of their members, besides their status or position either ascribed or achieved one. It also consists of differentiation of roles and statuses or positions in their respective existing hierarchy or in the overall system of social stratification. Moreover, social structure is operative at local level, hence, localised social structure, which in many ways exists as a replica of the generalised or even abstract social structure. Needless to say that social structure either in its abstract form or as a living reality is inclusive of economic and political power or authority, cultural and personality structures, with their well-defined regulatory mechanism(s). In that way, it also resembles with social system, though at the conceptual level the latter one is not only different from social structure but even its defining properties are separate from that of the former. For instance, a social system may consist of several structures or social structures and their role-relationships. Since our frame of reference of social structure in India, particularly in south India, is limited to caste system with the explicit hierarchy of castes and of status or rank of each caste in it, and both traditional and modern or present role(s) of its members, their achieved and ascribed statuses as well as their incongruence, their belief system and cultural practices, and their future aspirations or psychic mobility, we shall explain briefly here how the localised social structure has functioned over the last hundred years or so, and what kinds of changes have occurred in it in all these years.

As mentioned above, the social structure in south India, as elsewhere in the country, is localised in the sense of requirements of people in the various regions, yet it largely derives inspirations and even dictates, though more at the psychological level, from the religio-philisophical justification from the Sanskritic texts in whatsoever forms these are known or informed to its members—both literati and laity. In such social structure, people of the upper castes like Brahmin had not only enjoyed the superior most rank in the caste-hierarchy

but they also remained much better in socio-economic and religious positions than people of the middle and lower levels castes till the early phase of the 20th century. While this was true in the urban areas, the situation had completely changed in the rural areas since the 1970's because of the earlier adopted Land Reforms Act of the 1960's, followed by the imposed ceiling on size of the landholding per family. Prior to these land related legislations, almost all land was in the possession of the Brahmins, former princes or rulers, big landloards, etc., and people of both the middle and lower levels castes, including Dalits or the Scheduled Castes, were not only associated with land in their capacity of rentiers and landless labourers respectively but they were also under considerable degree of dominance of the former. With the adoption of the stated legislations, the situation became topsy-turvy atleast in the case of the middle level castes, who became the owner-cultivaters and who increased the size of their landholdings subsequently through their own efforts. So also, due to the man-power available in the family required for cultivation purpose, they flourised financially and captured power at the local as well as state levels because of their numerical dominance (for Andhra Pradesh, see Rao 1975, Rao 1998; for Kerala and Tamil Nadu, see Mencher 1975; for Karnataka, see Srinivas 1987).

But the lower castes or Dalits largely remained unaffected by the said legislations, and were pitiably forced to change their master from the Brahmins and other upper castes to the middle level castes. This brought two significant changes in the rural social structure in south India: one, a sizeable number of Brahmins moved to urban areas and got engaged in white collar jobs. Those who remained in villages, depended, as and when needed, on favour of the middle level castes for their sustenance and well-beings. Two, the landowners of the middle castes became more tyrants or tyrannical to the lower castes agricultural labourers. They became reluctant to pay required wages to the labourers—mostly Dalits, and started practicing untouchability and other forms of discrimination, both overtly and covertly, against the Dalits or lower castes

in more stringent fashion. However, their such practices did not go unchallenged as the lower castes in rural areas started showing considerable degree of resistance (see Mencher 1975, Rao 1998, Yagati 2003, Viswanthan 2005, Ramaiah 2007), resulting into large scale caste-violence and atrocities against them.

The situation has, however, remained somewhat different in urban areas where the Brahmins and other upper castes, although in numerical minority, continued to occupy the top positions in bureaucracy, various professions, and in religious and political organisations. While the trading castes managed the economy through trades and commerce, the middle and lower castes were engaged in sundry occupations, besides their employment in lower level bureaucratic jobs, professions, vending, in the unorganised sector of economic activities and so forth. It is only since the last few decades, especially the 1970s, people of the middle level castes started showing their presence in bureaucracy, politics and various professions as well as in educational institutions. The educational achievement, employment in white collar jobs and political participation, in case of the lower castes or Scheduled Castes in urban areas, are mostly State sponsored through its policy of protective discrimination or reservation, which of course has reached to a small section of their population living in both rural and urban areas. A point may be mentioned here that a relatively flexible social structure has emerged in urban areas during all these years, but it has not shelved completely its relation with the traditional social structure based on caste and communal considerations.

On the whole, some fluidity is visible in the structure of society and culture in south India, though crystals of the traditional social structure are definitely found even in day-to-day social interaction of the people drawn specially from the Brahmin and other upper castes as well as from the middle level castes with those of the Scheduled Castes. These are seen in the attitudes and behaviour of both educated and uneducated, rich and poor. But the fluid social structure as well as social relations among the various castes are found

more in urban than in rural areas, where social classes or status groups exist along the achievable attributes like education, occupational and power or authority positions, income and consumption, etc., though these generally do not transcend the traditional caste and communal or community lines in close interaction among the people, as stated above. On the contrary, some flexibility in agrarian social structure has also occurred, but that is confined mostly to the upper and lower castes, as stated earlier. A few classes like upper middle and lower classes, along the size of landholding and income level have emerged in the agrarian social structure, but these again are within the upper and middle level castes where caste still remains a cementing barrier in bringing these two caste groups together along their similarity in the class postion (Beteille 1965). Though a large majority of the Dalits or Scheduled Castes in rural areas fit in the lower class, there is hardly any class affinity between them and others placed in the same class as caste again comes in their way in establishing same class identity, commensal relations and other such close interaction. However, it is mostly the socially and politically conscious people of the Scheduled Castes who have been striving for bringing some quantitative and qualitative changes in the existing social structure in rural areas by articulating the idioms of social equality, liberty and fraternity, besides that of self-respect, dignity and social justice-the very dictum of the Constitution for a free society in Independent India.

Social Change and Mobility

Being a neutral or value free term, social change moves in forward or backward direction and has both positive and negative attributes, though in the general usage the former enjoys primacy over the latter. At the concrete level, both development—inclusive of social, economic, political and cultural as well as of human personality—and social structural and cultural modernisation, besides co-operation and conflict, are forms of social change. Then at the social relational level, change in inter-personal and inter-groups relationships is also termed as social change, both in the narrow and broad senses

respectively. In either case, change or social change is both time and space specific, i.e., both quantity and quality of change is visible distinctly at two different times and spaces. Similarly, social mobility as a concept simply means shift from one status or social status to the other either in vertical or horizontal direction. Although social mobility is examined in a given system of social statuses, which in themselves are fluid in nature, it has also been analysed extensively along a single status, or unit of status, like occupation, in the western societies, which are relatively open in nature and where occupation plays the most significant role in determining one's income, expenditure pattern, authority, lifestyle, and, in a way, one's social class position. But in Indian society, it is caste or other such primordial unit that has ever enjoyed the sole primacy in determining one's social status in the system of given social stratification, and occupation and other units of status or position are only the additional inputs to it. Hence, social mobility in the western sense is possible, in Indian society, only in the case of shift of these status units or positions but such social mobility is only *partial* and not *total* (for details, see Ram 1988), unless the entire group or corporate status group like caste or caste—like primordial unit moves either vertically or horizontally. It is not out of context to mention here that either vertical or horizontal move / mobility of an individual also does not help much as he/she is necessarily an inherent part of a caste or such primordial unit. Yet, mobility or social mobility in his/her case takes place along a single or even multiple status units, and it has also drawn attention of a few social scientists, especially sociologists and social anthropoligists, historians, etc., in their study of present as well as past society in India, though some studies of social mobility of the entire corporate status group are also available.

There are two more interesting aspects of social mobility in Indian society, particularly the Hindu caste system: one, social mobility through social movement and, two, through the State sponsorship, the former being operative since the early times and the latter, of course, being creation of the post-independent period. Since the early period of the colonial

rule in India, a few untouchable castes, like Izhava of Kerala and Shanan or Shanar of Tamil Nadu, had organised strong social movement for their elevation in the hierarchy of caste system in the respective states. As the frame of reference of their upward social mobility happened to be caste system, they succeeded in getting them elevated to the level of middle castes. Consequently, the Shanan adopted the nomenclature of Nadar but the Izhava retained the same nomenclature, though with the higher rank in the caste-hierarchy. Besides, there have been several other castes traditionally middle ranked like Kamma and Reddy in Andhra Pradesh; Lingayat and Vokaligga in Karnataka; Nayar in Kerala; and Thevar, Vannier and Vellala in Tamil Nadu, which have claimed their status or rank at par with the traditional Kshatriya caste (which had never existed in south India) due to their economic, political and numerical dominance in the respective states. But such claim, if there was any, of majority of the untouchable castes or the Scheduled Castes had never succeeded due to their traditional impure status as well as their economic and political vulnerability. Interestingly, their social reformers of the medieval period as well as their political leaders and ideologues of the colonial period had always condemned the caste system and emphasized social equality through the fair and equalitarian deal in the secular domains like education, employment, political power or authority, and social interaction and social relations with others. For the purpose, they had organised numerous social movements and made several petitions and submitted memorandums to the government. Needless to say that they succeeded to some extent, but looking at the huge population size of the untouchable castes, and the limitations of resources and the various types of social constraints of the government, their efforts could not produce the desired results. Moreover, the counter-forces or the *status quoists* resisted to any meaningful initiatives towards the required radical change or shift, in the then existing social order, to produce the desired result. All such initiatives yet paved the way for realising limited upward social mobility within the frame of socio-economic status or

loosely termed as class or social class, which in itself is problematic at the operative level, not being exclusive of caste or such other primordial unit, as stated earlier.

However, the limited upward social mobility, in the case of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and now the Other Backward Castes or Classes within the framework of socio-economic status or social class has been sponsored by the State, through the policy of reservation, as stated above. But such social mobility is confined only to a tiny section of the entire Scheduled Castes all over the country, although the size of such section of the upwardly mobile Scheduled Castes varies from region to region and from one Scheduled Caste to the other. In fact, the binary concept of sponsored and contest social mobility is distinctively visible as intertwined, rather, overlapping in the case of the upwardly mobile Scheduled Castes where for the State's sponsorship of limited positions or status-sets, there is contest among thousands of persons of these castes. The sponsorship is based on the individual's achievable attributes or merit, which could have proved them to be upwardly mobile even without the State's sponsorship, provided there was a fair chance. Also, the upward social mobility of the Scheduled Castes, at both the individual and group levels, is definitely inspired by the positive references of upwardly mobile individuals as well as groups drawn from the same or other such social background. It is also reinforced, though distantly, by several social movements organised for the purpose in the past. Then, both social change and social mobility together contribute significantly to bring about change in the social relations and micro as well as macro level social structure by making the latter relatively fluid.

Then, social change and mobility among the Scheduled Castes or Dalits in south India is to be analysed within social structure operative at both the micro and macro levels. Within the micro or village level social structure, it may be said that not much significant change has occurred among them over the last hundred years or so. For instance, their traditionally low caste status continues to exist in the local caste-hierarchy in villages. The practice of untouchability and other forms of

discrimination in their day-to-day interaction and social relations with people of the other castes and communities still exist in rural areas and small towns, though their conditions are, in some ways, better in cities. Not much qualitative and quantitative change is seen in the agrarian wage structure, and consequently the greater number of younger generation of Scheduled Castes or Dalits has become urban oriented during all these years. At the social relational level, greater degree and amount of tension and conflict has emerged between the scheduled and non-scheduled castes as is evident from the large number of caste conflict between them and the atrocities inflicted on the former in rural areas. Such change or social change is to be perceived as a corollary of the growing nature and amount of social consciousness and awareness, and also their assertion for dignity, self-respect and social justice among the Scheduled Castes or Dalits on one hand, and intolerance and suppression of the non-scheduled castes towards the former on the other in rural south India, as stated earlier. However, a fact may be mentioned here that such form of social change is witnessed among only those scheduled castes whose number or population size is large and who are more oriented towards achieving upward social mobility in the given social structure in rural areas. By implication, they also intend to alter or bring about qualitative change in that, which is resistibly retained by the non-scheduled castes.

The social structure is also to be understood in terms of intra-caste arrangement where each Scheduled Caste has been regulating its internal affairs through the mandatory caste panchayat. The caste panchayat has all along exerted its control over the deviant behaviour of caste members through assigning punishment either in the form of cash or kind or community feast as well as temporary boycott or ex-communication of offender from the caste, depending upon the nature and degree of offence. The caste membership of the offender used to be restored after fulfilling or meeting out the punishment. Sometimes, the caste panchayat has also mobilised the members to forgo the customary practice and bring about social reform among them. As the caste panchayat used to be constituted

either hereditarily or by elderly persons of the caste irrespective of level of their education and social consciousness, the younger generation started, in modern time, looking at it as oriented towards backwardness of the caste; hence, they invariably flouted its decision or arbitration, resulting into its irrelevance or absence among majority of the Scheduled Castes in rural south India. Hence, the contemporary social structure among the Scheduled Castes in south India, particularly in villages, remains amorphous, though traditional structural attributes are still present in preponderance and their relevance may not last long. The emergence of new social structure or restructuration of the existing one in rural south India in general and among the Scheduled Castes in particular, which is forcefully resisted by the upper and middle level castes, is a time-taking process, and its concrete nature and form lies only in future. Needless to say that the initiation of such process has been made by younger generation of the Scheduled Castes as it certainly favours them in providing better opportunities to improve their life chances vis-à-vis social status in both social and caste hierarchies at the macro and micro levels.

Finally, limited social mobility has taken place among the scheduled castes, both in rural and urban areas in south India, through both sponsorship, including contest, and social movement—the former being available in more systematic form since the Independence of the country and the latter remaining a continuous process atleast since the beginning of the 20th century. Without going into details of these two processes, it may be surmised here that both intra and inter-generational social mobility is visible among them more in urban than rural areas. It is found in the forms of educational achievement, white collar and other non-traditional employment, and limited amount of power or authority. Not only their income level is relatively improved, but they have also acquired greater degree of awareness and consciousness, besides their being assertive and more identity conscious. In rural areas, the limited upward social mobility is witnessed in the form of their being conscious and aware of the individual as well as collective identity, its suppression,

oppression and exploitation and so forth, irrespective of their educational level and sources of livelihood. However, their such consciousness vis-à-vis psychic or psychological mobility has not sailed without unequivocal resistance from the upper and middle levels castes. Their such psychological mobility, yet, continues to draw inspiration from their better-off brethren in urban areas and an overall awareness and consciousness emerged in all these years in Indian society as a whole in which the State initiatives, along with the existing socio-political leadership as well as of civil society or voluntary organisations, have also contributed to some extent.

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